



Project Dream Catcher Application New Sites

What is Project Dream Catcher?

Project Dream Catcher trains American Indian Education liaisons or cultural staff to work with special educators to be part of problem-solving intervention teams and to carry out behavior observations as part of tiered interventions, evaluations to determine eligibility for special education, or as part of the development of a behavior plan. In addition, special educators who participate in Dream Catcher learn more about American Indian students and methods of conducting fair special education evaluations. By working together, teams can better meet the needs of American Indian students and can also meet legal requirements to determine whether cultural or linguistic differences are the primary cause of challenges that a student is experiencing in school.

History

Project Dream Catcher is one of the recommended strategies in the guidelines “Promoting Fair Special Education Evaluations for American Indian and African American Students.” It began in 2015-16 with a small number of pilots, and since then has expanded to 40 school districts. Five to eight new sites are added each school year. Sites that have been involved are located in northern Minnesota as well as urban and suburban areas and have included single-school sites and district-wide sites. An upcoming goal is to create a co-op level or multi-district Dream Catcher team.

The project focuses on interventions and behavior observations because American Indian students in Minnesota have the highest proportion of students identified as having Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (EBD) when compared with students of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. While there are many factors that may contribute to this disproportionality, the absence of community and cultural perspective and involvement during this process is common and of concern. The ultimate goal is for schools to involve someone who has both cultural knowledge and knowledge of special education whenever an American Indian student is receiving interventions or has been referred for a special education evaluation.

Leadership for Project Dream Catcher is provided by Aaron Barnes, Division of Special Education, and project consultants Dr. Donna Patterson, recently retired from Augsburg University, and Govinda Budrow of Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College.

Data is collected each year, from both quantitative and qualitative sources. Dream Catcher participants have reported increases in the following areas. For additional information on outcomes, please contact the project team.

- Professional collaboration to assist students.
- Consideration of cultural background and issues such as trauma when planning interventions.
- Participation and meaningful involvement of American Indian Education staff in the intervention process, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and decision-making.

What is Provided?

- Participating schools or districts typically participate in an initial kickoff training, tentatively scheduled for the last week of September. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the kickoff training was held virtually. In 2022, we are planning to return to in-person training and will follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance for safe participation. The initial training gives all participants a foundation in strategies to conduct fair special education evaluation, specific training on observation techniques for American Indian Education staff, and activities designed to build communication between American Indian Education and special education. You will receive additional information from Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, which provides logistical support and other training to the Dream Catcher Project.
- Following the initial training, sites receive ongoing coaching via virtual meetings (frequency will depend on a self-assessment) and at least one on-site visit during the year. Some virtual meetings will be for both American Indian Education and special education staff in individual districts and some will be for separate groups of American Indian Education and special education staff. The virtual meetings will be scheduled on different days and times so that participants can choose the time that best fits with their schedule. The coaching will focus on improvement in observational skills, communication and collaboration between programs and support in moving forward on annual goals.
- Participating schools are also encouraged to host an introductory workshop on Dream Catcher and principles for Promoting Fair Evaluations for all staff at some point during the school year. Several of the sites that joined the program early requested this training as a way to share information with a broader group of staff, and so it has been incorporated into the Dream Catcher program.
- Participants will be invited (but not required) to attend to a two-day Winter Storytelling Event held at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College to share a visual representation of their work and hear guest speakers on a variety of topics.
- Participants will be invited (but not required) to join a Dream Catcher Weekly Zoom chat, started in March 2020 when schools first shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue these weekly gatherings moving forward as a way to share updates and strategies, problem solve, share resources and build community. Additionally, the Dream Catcher Facebook group is active and another way to share information.
- Project staff will work with sites to gather information for an evaluation of implementation and progress towards annual goals.

What are the obligations for participating schools?

- Sites are asked to identify at least one special education staff and at least one cultural staff.
- The special educator on the team will ensure that the cultural staff are aware of district procedures and that they are included in team meetings, evaluation plans and in decision making.
- Both Special Education and Cultural Liaison team members will participate in the kick-off training.
- Administrators are also invited to attend this training.
- Following the initial workshop, site teams will participate in regular virtual meetings scheduled at a mutually convenient time and in monthly topical webinars. Each meeting will last for approximately 30 minutes.
- Following the kick-off training, American Indian Education staff will begin conducting observations as part of multi-tiered systems of support for students who present with behavior problems, special education evaluations or as part of functional behavior assessments or behavior plans for students that already have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The Cultural Liaison staff may also participate in child study or student support teams, if they are not already doing so. It is hoped that American Indian

Education staff will carry out at least five observations during the year. Project Dream Catcher staff offers ongoing support as skills and comfort level increases.

- As noted above, sites are encouraged to host and have all staff participate in an introductory workshop on Dream Catcher and Promoting Fair Evaluations during the school year so that all staff are aware of the principles. This model has shown to be an effective way for developing a shared understanding and mutual goals, so that all team members can better meet the needs of American Indian students.
- Sites may be invited (but not required) to share information about Dream Catcher at workshops and conferences.
- Sites will also be asked to collaborate in evaluation. This will include: completing a form to collect data on students that receive observations or are served through an intervention process and the outcomes; share redacted excerpts from documents such as evaluation reports or IEPs to show how information gathered through observations is incorporated into decision making; provide samples of any written changes to policy and procedures; and completion of a survey.

Application Process

Because Dream Catcher involves multiple programs, district American Indian Education directors, special education directors or coordinators and the building principal or superintendent are all asked to sign off on applications. Completed applications are requested to be submitted at the start of the academic school year, with the information requested below and signatures. However, we do review and accept applications throughout the year. The completed application should be emailed to Dreamcatcher.Team.MDE@state.mn.us.

Questions to Consider Before Applying

- Should the site consist of a single school, a group of schools or the entire district? Is there a particular school that enrolls a high proportion of Native American students? Is there a school that has high rates of referral for special education evaluations?
- Has the district been notified by MDE that it has disproportionate rates of special education identification for American Indian students?
- Are American Indian Education staff assigned to specific schools or do they float among many schools?
- If the district is part of a special education cooperative, will the project involve district staff, coop staff or both?
- Is the district or school involved with programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) or Alternate Delivery of Specialized Instructional Support (ADSIS)? If yes, how does Dream Catcher align with these initiatives?
- How will the Local American Indian Education Parent Committee (LIEC) and similar groups be informed about and involved in Project Dream Catcher?
- Will the participating staff have the capacity, including time, for the regular virtual meetings (one to two hours per month)?
- Will the American Indian Education staff members have time in their schedule to conduct observations periodically and to attend meetings of intervention and IEP teams?
- Does the district or school have sufficient American Indian Education staff members with cultural knowledge and ties to the local community?



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Name and position of person answering these questions	Amanda Rasmussen/ Maria Poderzay				
Email and phone number	amanda.rasmussen@rrps.org/maria.poderzay@rrps.org				
Is the district part of a special education cooperative? If so, which one?	2909 Rock Ridge				
Will the site consist of a single school, a group of schools, or the full district?	Full district				
In the school(s) that will be involved with Dream Catcher, what is the approximate number or percentage of students that are American Indian? Please note that American Indian student counts can be used for this application.					
In the school(s) that will be involved with Dream Catcher, what is the approximate number or percentage of American Indian students that are receiving special education services? Please note that American Indian student counts can be used for this application.					
In the school(s) that will be involved with Dream Catcher, what is the approximate number of American Indian students who are classified as EBD?					
Is the district or a school involved with PBIS or ADSIS?	no				
Based on your experience, how connected are American Indian Education staff and Special Education staff?	Not connected at all	Somewhat unconnected	Neutral	Somewhat connected	Very connected
			X		
Given that Dream Catcher involves collaboration between Indian Education and Special Education, please identify the staff and their position that will potentially be part the project:					
Indian Education staff	Indian Education Director				
Special Education Staff	Para Support				

Briefly describe or give examples of the types of interactions and partnerships that currently exist between Indian Education and Special Education (for example, Indian Education and Special Education both participate in intervention teams; Indian Education staff routinely attend IEP meetings for American Indian students):

We are in the process of joining together and collaborating more. Hoping to gather more information from this program.

Why are you interested in participating in Project Dream Catcher?

In ways to do better for our Native American students and better understanding of cultural differences.

Are there any special factors or circumstances that might affect the district or school's participation?

The district is interested in the program and wanting more information.

Signatures

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Superintendent, principal, or another authorized administrator

PRINTED NAME

Indian Education Director or Coordinator

SIGNATURE

PRINTED NAME

Special Education Director or Coordinator

SIGNATURE

PRINTED NAME

SIGNATURE

Please send the signed application to: Dreamcatcher.Team.MDE@state.mn.us

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For further information, contact: Dreamcatcher.Team.MDE@state.mn.us

Govinda Budrow (dreamcatcher.mde@gmail.com)

Donna Patterson, Ph.D. (dreamcatcher2.mde@gmail.com)

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PRINTED NAME

Indian Education Director or Coordinator

SIGNATURE

PRINTED NAME

Special Education Director or Coordinator

SIGNATURE

Stephanie Aagene
PRINTED NAME

Stephanie Aagene
SIGNATURE

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